

# Dave Spirtes, 1948-2004

Dave Spirtes left Alaska with his wife and daughter in the spring of 2003, for new challenges as Superintendent of Fire Island National Seashore. Back in his home state of New York, Dave's determination, integrity, and commitment quickly gained the respect of co-workers and community alike. Dave was unexpectedly diagnosed with cancer little more than a year after leaving Alaska, and he succumbed to the illness on April 15, 2004. *Alaska Park Science* is proud to include these tributes to our friend, colleague, and mentor in this article about the Western Arctic Caribou Herd that Dave worked so hard to conserve and protect.

As a friend and colleague of Dave Spirtes for many years, it is fitting to honor his contributions to Alaska parks by dedicating this issue of *Alaska Park Science* to his memory. He had passion for the parks and for the people of northwest Alaska, quietly garnering support and understanding by his personal example. Dave left us too soon—yet his spirit continues to guide our actions in preserving and protecting these special places he loved.

**Marcia Blaszk, Regional Director  
National Park Service, Alaska Region**



Photograph courtesy of Bob Adkins



**Dave Spirtes (on left) in 2003 with Ron Arnberger,  
Alaska Regional Director (retired).**

National Park Service photograph by Bob Belous, ARCC



I worked with Dave Spirtes from 1997 until early 2003. We had a mutual interest in organizing and working with the Western Arctic Caribou Herd Working Group, a stakeholder organization concerned with the management of Alaska's largest caribou herd. When we met, Dave was NPS Superintendent of Western Parklands at Kotzebue and I was a wildlife biologist with the Alaska Department of Fish and Game.

Dave Spirtes was a results-oriented administrator who wasn't afraid to try new ideas. He backed up his words with actions. And he had a knack for working effectively with others and producing results. His affable and energetic persona made it easy for people from differing cultures and backgrounds to work with him and, as a result, together. He was particularly effective in working with Alaska Native communities in northwest Alaska.

Dave wrote the first draft of the

Western Arctic Caribou Herd Cooperative Management Plan. He contributed significantly to the growth of shared trust and vision in the Western Arctic Caribou Herd Working Group—no mean feat.

I, along with the WACH Working group, last saw him in Nome, in the bright March sunshine of 2003. Most of the group members were wearing hats that Dave and his assistant Willie Goodwin had made. We had just signed our Cooperative Caribou Management Plan and had said heartfelt good-byes to Dave who was off to Fire Island, New York.

In my mind Dave Spirtes was, and still is, the quintessential public servant in the Alaska natural resources arena. He brought people together, and together they created resource management legacies that will not soon be forgotten.

**John N. Trent, Ph.D.,  
Supervisory Wildlife Biologist  
US Fish and Wildlife Service**